

## **South Carolinians Eat More Fruits and Veggies Thanks to Grocery Store Initiative**

### ***Issue***

Chef Sheila Veach was not sure kale soup would be popular with Saturday shoppers at BI-LO grocery store in Columbia, S.C. In just two hours, all the kale soup was gone and customers were asking for more. Produce department staff noted sales of fresh kale were higher than usual.

However, this scenario is rare in South Carolina where only one in five adults eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Less than 25 percent of adolescents consume five to nine servings daily. Compared to people who eat only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more generous amounts—as part of a healthy diet—are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases.

### ***Intervention***

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Clemson University Culinary Science Program and BI-LO grocery stores are working to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables. As part of South Carolina's launch of the "Fruits and Veggies—More Matters"® national brand, BI-LO grocery stores in Simpsonville and Columbia sponsored pilot in-store events. The initiative, called "What's Cooking?" included events on 14 Saturdays from March through June 2007. The pilot program, which was funded in part by the Preventative Health and Health Services Block Grant, used the following strategies:

- Student and professional chefs volunteered their time and prepared a different healthy recipe each week for customers to taste;
- Customers got a new recipe and nutrition tip each week to try at home;
- Recipe ingredients and suggested portion sizes were displayed;
- A volunteer team of a DHEC registered dietitian and a professional chef was at BI-LO each week to answer customers' questions and offer suggestions;
- Customers participated in a pre- and post-survey about their food/nutrition and produce purchase habits; and
- BI-LO analyzed produce purchases of participating customers before and during the pilot.

### ***Impact***

About 1,000 customers tried samples of the healthy recipes offered in both stores over the 14-week period. A number of customers reported making the kale soup and other healthy recipes and that their families ate every bite. Chef Sheila prepares the soup for her husband and their 5 and 7 year-old sons, and it has fast become a favorite. Other results include:

- Produce purchases for the Simpsonville group increased by 6% when compared to purchases made immediately before their involvement in the pilot program.
- BI-LO grocery has agreed to support the events in other locations throughout the state, which includes:
  - Advertising of events promoting "What's Cooking?;"
  - Offering customer incentives to take part in the program; and
  - Providing ingredients for the sample recipes.

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